

The Ouachita River flows through the center of the Ouachita River basin, entering the state from Arkansas. The river flows south through Ouachita and Caldwell parishes before joining the Tensas River to form the Black River, which flows into the Red River. The word "Ouachita" comes from the Indian word "Washita" which means 'river of good hunting grounds' and 'sparkling silver water'. Indians lived and hunted along the Ouachita River until the early 1700's when the French settled along its banks. The Spanish had explored the area, but the French were the first Europeans to actually live along the river, naming many of the bayous, such as: Bayou Bartholomew, Bayou Lafourche, Bayou Desaird, and Bayou D'Arbonne. Historically, the Ouachita River flooded routinely, providing bottomland hardwood forests and croplands with fresh sediment and nutrients that comprise the rich alluvial soils that exist today in the Ouachita River Basin. Levees were built to constrain the river, allowing for more agricultural production and settlement in the floodplains. Today, the Ouachita River provides recreational opportunities and a source of fresh water for the people of Louisiana.



Success through Partnerships

There has been a long history of partnerships within the Ouachita River Basin, working to restore bottomland hardwood forests, providing cost-share and technical assistance to farmers and landowners for agricultural BMPs, taking highly erodible lands out of production and converting them to pastures or forests. Cities are implementing BMPs through their storm water permit programs, foresters and loggers are utilizing BMPs as they harvest trees and replant the areas for new forests. Therefore the work of restoring water quality has already begun but more needs to be done to fully restore the water quality to the rivers, bayous and lakes within the Ouachita River Basin. Some of the partners that have been working together include:

- Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ)
- Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Northeast Delta Resource Conservation and Development District
- Northeast Louisiana University at Monroe
- Louisiana Tech University
- The Louisiana Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- The City of West Monroe

If you wish to learn more about how you can become involved in watershed protection, contact the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality or other cooperating agencies or organizations.



Ouachita River Basin



Water Quality Concerns

The eastern part of the Ouachita River Basin has rivers that flow through the agricultural lands of the Mississippi Delta. These rivers and bayous transport sediments and nutrients from the various types of crops such as cotton, wheat, sorghum, corn and soybeans. Consequently, many of these bayous are not meeting the fish and wildlife propagation use because of turbidity, nutrients and failure to meet the dissolved oxygen water quality standard. The western part of the Ouachita River Basin consists of forests, pastures and poultry operations. The rivers that flow through this part of the basin transport sediments, nutrients and bacteria, resulting in water bodies impaired for contact recreation and fish and wildlife propagation. Cities and smaller urban communities, individual home sewage systems and highway construction also contribute pollutants to the water bodies that flow through the Ouachita River Basin.

Restoring the Water Quality

Progress has been made in restoring water quality in the Ouachita River Basin, but more work still needs to be done. Many programs have been implemented to increase the level of best management practices (BMPs) in agricultural and forestry areas. Poultry operations have implemented nutrient management plans and cities have implemented storm water regulations.

As more emphasis is placed on watershed restoration, the types of BMPs that will need to be implemented include:

- **AGRICULTURE** – sediment and erosion control practices such as conservation tillage, grassed waterways, herbicide and pesticide management, rotational grazing and fencing for pastures and stream bank protection of riparian areas;
- **SEPTIC SYSTEMS** – maintenance of existing home sewage systems and repair or replacement of failing systems;
- **URBAN STORM WATER** – smart growth, green infrastructure such as rain gardens, grassed swales, porous pavements, protection of urban forests and natural and constructed wetlands;
- **ROAD AND HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION** – sediment and erosion control practices, protection of bridge crossings and streamside management zones;
- **FORESTRY** – selective harvesting, forest road BMPs, pesticide and fertilizer management, protection of streamside management zones;
- **HYDROMODIFICATION** – protection of riparian areas, wetlands and stream banks and natural channel design.

Protecting and Restoring Native Habitats

The Ouachita River Basin has many special habitats that provide a home for native plants and animals that live along rivers or in the forests or prairies that comprise the basin. Some of these special habitats include hardwood flatwoods, calcareous prairies and forests, bottomland hardwood forests, cypress swamps, scrub/shrub swamps, small stream forests and the mixed loblolly forest. These habitats are home to native species such as the bald eagle, Louisiana black bear, paddlefish, and red-cockaded woodpecker, Louisiana pine snake, pink mucket pearly mussel, Louisiana pearlshell mussel, southern lady slipper, earth fruit, and southern shield wood fern, Cooper's hawk, and the osprey. Some of the stressors to these habitats and species include timber harvests, chemical contamination with herbicides and pesticides, reduced use of regular prescribed burning, construction of roads, pipelines and utilities, residential, commercial and industrial development, off-road vehicles and gravel mining (Louisiana Natural Heritage Program).



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